Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
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FIELD TRIP: Sunday, April 14, 2024, 6.15AM: Osman Sagar Lake, Hyderabad. Meeting Point(s): Taramati Baradari Resort, 05:20AM; Sri Sai Famous Tea & Udupi Hotel, 05:50AM. Trip Coordinator(s): Adnan Uddin (Mobile: 95337-01702)

Osman Sagar Lake, also referred to locally as the Gandipet Lake, is a man-made lake that spans about 46 sq km. The lake is home to around 278 species of birds, including Indian Spot-billed Duck, Little Ringed Plover, Red-naped Ibis, Purple Heron, Grey Heron, Little Grebe, Indian Pied Starling, Brahminy Kite, Western Yellow Wagtail, River Tern, Blyth's Reed Warbler, Painted Stork, Glossy Ibis, Long-tailed Shrike, Streaked Weaver, Jerdon's Bushlark, Clamorous Reed Warbler, Yellow-footed Green Pigeon and Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse among others.

This will be a half-day trip, so carry adequate water and breakfast/snacks, and protective gear if required. Covid protocols will be followed; please ensure you wear masks, carry a sanitiser and maintain social distancing. Non-members are most welcome; however, they are requested to contribute Rs. 100/- per person to the Deccan Birders kitty. New Deccan Birders hats and caps will be available for purchase; please carry adequate cash.

Trip Report: Mokila, March 17, 2024

Dr Krishna Nagarajan

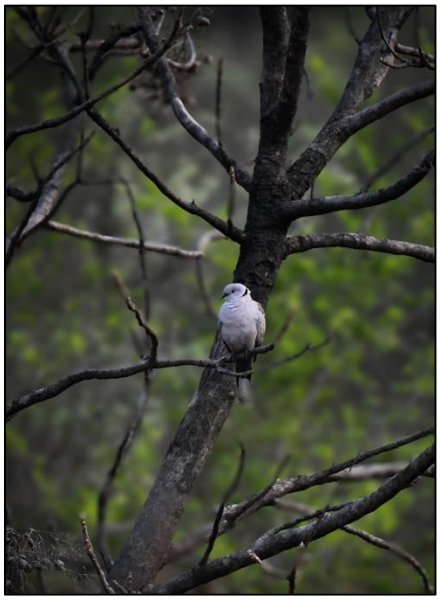
Black-winged Stilt, Spot-billed Duck and Grey Heron at Mokila Lake
(Photo: Gokul Krishna Addanki)

Mokila as a birding destination was added to the menu recently, and I had missed the opportunity to join the group the last couple of times a trip was organized to this place. This time around, the timing was perfect as the workload at office was manageable. Our children having completed their annual exams recently, the stress levels in the house was also manageable. It was indeed a good time to get up early in the morning and sneak out quietly, not having to worry about the repercussions upon return.

I decided to join the group directly at the starting point of the field trip – Gautaminagar Temple. As soon as I reached the temple, I saw a Painted Stork soaring in the sky, hinting that there must be small lakes and water bodies around. This was later confirmed by the trip coordinator Gokul. As per Google Maps, the starting point is actually in Edulanagulpalli and not in Mokila; in fact, the entire birding route including the end-point, which is a small lake are in Edulanagulpalli.

Map of the region (Source: Google Maps)

At around 06:15AM, we all assembled near the temple and started preparing our gear – binoculars, camera, notepad and pencil to prepare the checklist, etc. It was a clear beautiful morning with a lot of sunlight. Surprisingly, it was a small group of five adults and two children – I had expected more.



Eurasian Collared Dove (Photo: Mohd Adnan Uddin)

At the temple, we saw flocks of Rose-ringed Parakeets jetting past us in multiple bursts one after the other, as if they were doing an air show, and we were standing and watching in awe. We also sighted Spotted Dove, Laughing Dove, Black Drongo, Eurasian Collared Dove, Indian Robin, Indian Bushlark, and Green Bee-eater.

The route between the temple and the lake must have been around 1.5 km long. We started walking slowly, looking around on both sides. The 'sunshot' opportunity with a Black Drongo sitting on a branch with the rising sun in the background presented itself. All of us lined up one after the other and tried to get the best shot possible.

Rose-ringed Parakeet (Photo: Gokul Krishna Addanki)

Black Drongo against the rising sun
(Photo: Mohd Adnan Uddin)

Moving along, we sighted Grey Francolin, Small Minivet and Blyth's Reed Warbler. We then decided to take a detour to the left, where we spotted a Black-headed Ibis, Long-tailed Shrike, Bay-backed Shrike and Yellow-wattled Lapwing. This was the day for taking an infinite number of pictures of the Shrikes, Yellow-wattled Lapwings and Sandgrouse – more about the Sandgrouse later!

Yellow-wattled Lapwing (Photo: Mohd Adnan Uddin)

Birding with kids – especially aged less than 10 years – presents some interesting challenges. As parents, we would like them to get the feel for outdoors, pray that they find a bird that they connect with, maybe draw and write a few lines about it later in the day, spend quality time and take pride in our birding abilities, and hopefully pick it up as a hobby when they grow up. The reality is somewhere in between. After few minutes of trying to get a hang of things, they realize that the elders are busy spotting the birds and shouting weird bird names and claiming they sighted those birds. The kids start making up their own games instead. Everything that is flying up there is a 'raptor' for them. Stones and pebbles become their focus, any stray dog or cow around becomes an object of curiosity. But it is nevertheless fun birding with kids as they provide plenty of entertainment along the way.

Blue Rock Pigeon (Photo: Gokul Krishna Addanki)

After walking a bit, the parents decided to drive their cars towards the destination as it would be easier with the kids while returning. We spotted Red-naped Ibis, Red-wattled Lapwing, Brahminy Starlings, Sykes's Lark, Plain Prinia, House Crow and Indian Peafowl along the route before reaching the water body at the end. I was told that the water levels have receded significantly in the last two weeks and it is likely to completely become dry in the next few weeks.

Black-winged Stilt (Photo: Mohd Adnan Uddin)

There were a lot of birds around the water: Little Ringed Plovers, River Terns, Spot-billed Ducks, Intermediate and Cattle Egrets, Barn Swallows, Ashy-crowned Sparrow Larks, Grey and Pond Herons, Common and Wood Sandpipers, White-throated and Kingfishers, Black-winged Stilt, Common Greenshank, Small Pratincole, Asian Palm Swift, and Streak-throated Swallow. We spent a lot of time parked around the lake as there were many birds and plenty of opportunities to take pictures.

We had to wait for a while for the Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse to arrive; we expected them to visit the lake, but they chose to land and settle down a bit far from the lake. The trip coordinator, Gokul, decided to give a demo on how to bird around and take pictures from a car. We all sat in the car and went hunting for the Sandgrouse. Interestingly, as we approached slowly, the Sandgrouse did not mind. They were comfortable as long as we were at a certain distance and allowed us to take plenty of pictures.

Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse (Photo: Mohd Adnan Uddin)

Finally, we decided to walk around the water body and check if we could sight any further birds. Luckily, we did sight the Blue-faced Malkoha, Red Avadavat, White-browed Wagtail, Indian Silverbill, Common Myna and Large Grey Babblers while walking around the lake.

Blue-faced Malkoha (Photo: Gokul Krishna Addanki)

Red Avadavat flock (Photo: Gokul Krishna Addanki)

By now, it was almost 09:00AM, and we decided to walk back to the cars and head home. While walking back we discussed about the different cameras, their advantages and disadvantages, and how it is different birding in India when compared to other countries. After the usual chatter and banter we decided to call it a day and leave for home.

Birding around the Gautaminagar temple near Mokila/Edulanagulpalli area was really fascinating – I had never thought we could find so many different species of birds in this area. I made a mental note to come back again to do solo birding. It may not be long before the entire area is converted into a concrete jungle, so the sooner the better.

Common Iora (Photo: Gokul Krishna Addanki)

The full list of birds seen during the trip:

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
1	Eurasian Collared Dove	*Streptopelia decaocto*	30	Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark	*Eremopterix griseus*
2	Painted Stork	*Mycteria leucocephala*	31	Intermediate Egret	*Ardea intermedia*
3	Indian Robin	*Saxicoloides fulicatus*	32	Cattle Egret	*Bubulcus ibis*
4	Spotted Dove	*Spilopelia chinensis*	33	Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*
5	Laughing Dove	*Streptopelia senegalensis*	34	Common Sandpiper	*Actitis hypoleucos*
6	Rose-ringed Parakeet	*Psittacula krameri*	35	Wood Sandpiper	*Tringa glareola*
7	Grey Francolin	*Francolinus pondicerianus*	36	Common Greenshank	*Tringa nebularia*
8	Indian Bushlark	*Mirafra erythroptera*	37	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*
9	Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*	38	Common Kingfisher	*Alcedo atthis*
10	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*	39	Small Pratincole	*Glareola lactea*
11	Small Minivet	*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*	40	Spot-billed Duck	*Anas poecilorhyncha*
12	Blyth's Reed Warbler	*Acrocephalus dumetorum*	41	Black-winged Stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*
13	Black-headed Ibis	*Threskiornis melanocephalus*	42	Common Iora	*Aegithina tiphia*
14	Yellow-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus malabaricus*	43	Asian Palm Swift	*Cypsiurus balasiensis*
15	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*	44	Lesser Whitethroat	*Sylvia curruca*
16	Long-tailed Shrike	*Lanius schach*	45	Common Tailorbird	*Orthotomus sutorius*
17	Bay-backed Shrike	*Lanius vittatus*	46	Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse	*Pterocles exustus*
18	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*	47	Streak-throated Swallow	*Petrochelidon fluvicola*
19	Brahminy Starling	*Sturnia pagodarum*	48	Little Stint	*Calidris minuta*
20	Rosy Starling	*Pastor roseus*	49	Spotted Owlet	*Athene brama*
21	Sykes's Lark	*Galerida deva*	50	Blue-faced Malkoha	*Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*
22	Plain Prinia	*Prinia inornata*	51	Red Avadavat	*Amandava amandava*
23	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*	52	White-browed Wagtail	*Motacilla maderaspatensis*
24	Red-naped Ibis	*Pseudibis papillosa*	53	Indian Silverbill	*Euodice malabarica*
25	House Crow	*Corvus splendens*	54	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*
26	Little Ringed Plover	*Charadrius dubius*	55	Large Grey Babbler	*Turdoides malcolmi*
27	River Tern	*Sterna aurantia*	56	Blue Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*
28	Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*	57	Paddyfield Pipit	*Anthus rufulus*
29	Pond Heron	*Ardeola greyii*	58	Black-shouldered Kite	*Elanus caeruleus*

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BIRDWATCHING AT BHUJ, GUJARAT

Report: January 16-25, 2023

Text & Photos: Dr Vaithianathan Kannan

Mixed flock of waders at Bhuj

Bhuj, located in the Kutch region of Gujarat, India, is a haven for birdwatchers due to its diverse avian population and unique habitats. The area's varied landscapes, including wetlands, grasslands, and desert expanses, attract a wide range of bird species throughout the year.

One of the most iconic birdwatching destinations in Bhuj is the Great Rann of Kutch, an expansive salt marsh known for its stunning vistas and a prime habitat for a variety of waterfowl and wading birds. During the winter months, migratory birds from as far as Siberia and Europe flock to the Rann, including species like flamingos, cranes, and pelicans.

Thousands of flamingos, both Greater and Lesser, create a spectacular pink hue against the white salt flats.

Greater Flamingo

Common Crane

Other notable species include Demoiselle Cranes, Common Cranes, pelicans, storks, and various species of ducks and geese. The wetlands provide essential feeding and resting grounds for these birds, making them a critical stopover point along their migration routes.

Northern Pintail

Great White Pelican

Another notable birding hotspot in Bhuj is the Banni Grasslands Reserve, a vast expanse of grassland and scrub forest. This area is home to a wide variety of bird species, including the critically endangered Great Indian Bustard, as well as harriers, eagles, and vultures – raptors such as Eastern Imperial Eagles, Short-toed Snake Eagles, Montagu's Harriers, and Eurasian Griffon Vultures can often be spotted soaring overhead.

Oriental Honey-Buzzard

Black Kite

The grasslands, which support a variety of resident and migratory songbirds, are alive with the calls of larks, pipits, shrikes, and wheatears, making it a paradise for birdwatchers all year round.

Desert Wheatear

Common Babbler

In addition to these larger habitats, Bhuj is dotted with smaller wetlands, lakes, and reservoirs, each offering unique birdwatching opportunities. Chhari Dhand, Fulay, and Kutch Bustard Sanctuary are just a few examples of these smaller birding sites, each hosting a different array of species depending on the season.

Black-headed Ibis

Western Reef Egret

Chhari Dhand, a seasonal wetland, is a haven for waterfowl, especially during the monsoon season when it fills up with rainwater. One can expect to see a variety of waders, herons, egrets, and ibises here, along with shorebirds like sandpipers, plovers, and stilts.

Brown-headed Gull

Heuglin's Gull

Fulay Lake, located near Nakhatrana, is another important birding site in the Bhuj area. It supports a diverse array of resident and migratory waterbirds, including ducks, coots, grebes, and terns. The surrounding scrubland is home to species like Indian Courser, Indian Bushlark, and Greater Hoopoe Lark.

The Kutch Bustard Sanctuary, as the name suggests, this sanctuary is dedicated to the conservation of the Great Indian Bustard, one of the heaviest flying birds in the world. In addition to the bustard, the sanctuary is also home to other grassland species such as Indian Courser, Desert Wheatear, and Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse.

Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse

Birdwatching in Bhuj is not only about spotting rare and exotic species but also about immersing oneself in the sights and sounds of a vibrant ecosystem and experiencing the unique culture and landscape of the region. Birding trips to Bhuj often include visits to local villages, where visitors can learn about traditional crafts, cuisine, and customs while enjoying the hospitality of the Kutchi people.

Bhuj promises an unforgettable birding experience for enthusiasts of all levels, from casual observers to seasoned ornithologists. With its diverse habitats, abundant birdlife, and rich cultural heritage, Bhuj is truly a must-visit destination for any birdwatching enthusiast.

My birding experience in Bhuj was absolutely breathtaking. Waking up before dawn, I often ventured out to the Great Rann of Kutch, where the soft hues of the rising sun painted the landscape. As I quietly walked along the marshes and salt flats, I was mesmerized by the sight of elegant flamingos gracefully wading through the shallow waters. The air was filled with the calls of countless migratory birds, adding to the enchantment of the moment. With each step, I discovered new species, from majestic cranes to tiny warblers flitting among the reeds. It was a truly immersive experience, connecting me to the beauty and serenity of nature in a way I'll never forget.

Painted Stork

As I continued my birding adventures in Bhuj, I found myself drawn deeper into the heart of the wetlands. With every turn, there was something new to discover - a pair of Painted Storks building their nest atop a tall tree, a group of elegant Common Cranes dancing in the distance, and the occasional glimpse of a soaring raptor scanning the marshland below. As the days drew to a close, I couldn't help but feel a profound sense of gratitude for the opportunity to witness such natural beauty up close and to be a part of this vibrant ecosystem, if only for a fleeting moment.

As the sun would begin to set over the horizon, casting a warm golden glow across the landscape, I would find a peaceful spot to sit and reflect on the day's adventures. Surrounded by the tranquil beauty of the wetlands, I was struck by the sheer diversity of life that thrived in this seemingly harsh environment. Flocks of flamingos painted the sky pink as they flew overhead, while the haunting calls of distant cranes echoed across the marshes. It was a moment of pure serenity, a chance to pause and appreciate the wonders of the natural world. And as darkness fell and the stars emerged one by one, I knew that my birding experience in Bhuj would forever hold a special place in my heart, a cherished memory of some truly magical days spent in harmony with nature.

The full list of birds seen during the period:

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
1	Black-shouldered Kite	*Elanus caeruleus*	26	Common Redshank	*Tringa totanus*
2	Black Kite	*Milvus migrans*	27	Common Sandpiper	*Actitis hypoleucos*
3	Shikra	*Accipiter badius*	28	Common Greenshank	*Tringa nebularia*
4	Pallid Harrier	*Circus macrourus*	29	Yellow-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus malarbaricus*
5	Oriental Honey-buzzard	*Pernis ptilorhyncus*	30	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*
6	Osprey	*Pandion haliaetus*	31	Pacific Golden Plover	*Pluvialis fulva*
7	Crested Serpent Eagle	*Spilornis cheela*	32	Eurasian Thick-knee	*Burhinus oedicnemus*
8	Eurasian Marsh Harrier	*Circus aeruginosus*	33	River Tern	*Sterna aurantia*
9	Bonelli's Eagle	*Hieraaetus fasciatus*	34	Whiskered Tern	*Chlidonias hybridus*
10	Comb Duck	*Sarkidiornis melanotos*	35	Gull-billed Tern	*Gelochelidon nilotica*
11	Common Pochard	*Aythya ferina*	36	Black-winged Stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*
12	Common Teal	*Anas crecca*	37	Woolly-necked Stork	*Ciconia episcopus*
13	Garganey	*Anas querquedula*	38	Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	*Treron phoenicoptera*
14	Northern Pintail	*Anas acuta*	39	Spotted Dove	*Streptopelia chinensis*
15	Northern Shoveler	*Anas clypeata*	40	Red Collared Dove	*Streptopelia tranquebarica*
16	Spot-billed Duck	*Anas poecilorhyncha*	41	Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*
17	Common Hoopoe	*Upupa epops*	42	Laughing Dove	*Streptopelia senegalensis*
18	Asian Palm Swift	*Cypsiurus balasiensis*	43	Eurasian Collared Dove	*Streptopelia decaocto*
19	House Swift	Apus affinis	44	Indian Roller	*Coracias benghalensis*
20	Indian Grey Hornbill	*Ocyceros birostris*	45	European Roller	*Coracias garrulus*
21	Wood Sandpiper	*Tringa glareola*	46	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*
22	Ruff	*Philomachus pugnax*	47	Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*
23	Little Stint	*Calidris minuta*	48	Asian Koel	*Eudynamys scolopacea*
24	Marsh Sandpiper	*Tringa stagnatilis*	49	Greater Coucal	*Centropus sinensis*
25	Black-tailed Godwit	*Limosa limosa*	50	Grey Francolin	*Francolinus pondicerianus*

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
51	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*	90	Baya Weaver	*Ploceus philippinus*
52	Jungle Bush Quail	*Perdicula asiatica*	91	White-eared Bulbul	*Pycnonotus leucotis*
53	Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark	*Eremopterix grisea*	92	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*
54	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*	93	Red-whiskered Bulbul	*Pycnonotus jocosus*
55	Common Tailorbird	*Orthotomus sutorius*	94	White-browed Fantail	*Rhipidura aureola*
56	Plain Prinia	*Prinia inornata*	95	Bank Myna	*Acridotheres ginginianus*
57	Rufous Treepie	*Dendrocitta vagabunda*	96	Brahminy Starling	*Sturnus pagodarum*
58	Large-billed Crow	*Corvus macrorhynchos*	97	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*
59	House Crow	*Corvus splendens*	98	Rosy Starling	*Sturnus roseus*
60	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*	99	Common Coot	*Fulica atra*
61	White-bellied Drongo	*Dicrurus caerulescens*	100	White-breasted Waterhen	*Amaurornis phoenicurus*
62	Scaly-breasted Munia	*Lonchura punctulata*	101	Common Moorhen	*Gallinula chloropus*
63	Indian Silverbill	*Lonchura malabarica*	102	Common Crane	*Grus grus*
64	Red Avadavat	*Amandava amandava*	103	Great Egret	*Casmerodius albus*
65	Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*	104	Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*
66	Wire-tailed Swallow	*Hirundo smithii*	105	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*
67	Red-rumped Swallow	*Hirundo daurica*	106	Intermediate Egret	*Mesophoyx intermedia*
68	Bay-backed Shrike	*Lanius vittatus*	107	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*
69	Rufous-tailed Shrike	*Lanius isabellinus*	108	Purple Heron	*Ardea purpurea*
70	Long-tailed Shrike	*Lanius schach*	109	Cattle Egret	*Bubulcus ibis*
71	Common Babbler	*Turdoides earlei*	110	Dalmatian Pelican	*Pelecanus crispus*
72	Jungle Babbler	*Turdoides striatus*	111	Black Ibis	*Pseudibis papillosa*
73	Large Grey Babbler	*Turdoides malcolmi*	112	Black-headed Ibis	*Threskiornis melanocephalus*
74	Citrine Wagtail	*Motacilla citreola*	113	Eurasian Spoonbill	*Platalea leucorodia*
75	White Wagtail	*Motacilla alba*	114	Glossy Ibis	*Plegadis falcinellus*
76	Grey Wagtail	*Motacilla cinerea*	115	Asian Openbill	*Anastomus oscitans*
77	Asian Brown Flycatcher	Muscicapa dauurica	116	Painted Stork	*Mycteria leucocephala*
78	Black Redstart	*Phoenicurus ochruros*	117	Little Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax niger*
79	Brown Rock Chat	Cercomela fusca	118	Great Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*
80	Common Stonechat	*Saxicola torquata*	119	Greater Flamingo	*Phoenicopterus ruber*
81	Desert Wheatear	*Oenanthe deserti*	120	Little Grebe	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*
82	Variable Wheatear	*Oenanthe picata*	121	Alexandrine Parakeet	*Psittacula eupatria*
83	Indian Robin	*Saxicoloides fulicata*	122	Plum-headed Parakeet	*Psittacula cyanocephala*
84	Isabelline Wheatear	*Oenanthe isabellina*	123	Rose-ringed Parakeet	*Psittacula krameri*
85	Oriental Magpie Robin	*Copsychus saularis*	124	Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse	*Pterocles exustus*
86	Pied Bushchat	*Saxicola caprata*	125	Coppersmith Barbet	*Megalaima haemacephala*
87	Purple Sunbird	*Nectarinia asiatica*	126	Indian Nightjar	*Caprimulgus asiaticus*
88	Eurasian Golden Oriole	*Oriolus oriolus*	127	Peregrine Falcon	*Falco peregrinus*
89	House Sparrow	*Passer domestics*	128	Spotted Owlet	*Athene brama*

Some other photos taken during this period:

Citrine Wagtail

White-browed Wagtail

Pied Avocet

Wood Sandpiper

Grey Francolin

Green Bee-eater

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Bird of the Month

Text and Photos: Umesh Mani

Zitting Cisticola (*Cisticola juncidis*)

Zitting Cisticola (L) and pair (R) (Chennai, August 15, 2020)

Order: Passeriformes
Family: Cisticolidae
Genus: *Cisticola*
Species: *C. juncidis*
Size: 10 cm

Description & distribution: The Zitting Cisticola is a widely distributed Old World warbler that was earlier known as Streaked Fantail Warbler. Its breeding range spans from Africa (except the deserts and rainforest), southern Europe, southern Asia all the way down to Australia. Since the range is so large, there are slight variations in plumage, size and calls between various populations, and as many as 18 sub-species are recognized. Since the type specimen was from Sicily, the birds of Sicily and nearby areas like Corsica, Greece Turkey, southern France and Egypt are considered the nominate, whereas Spain and western Portugal have *C. j. cisticola*. Syria, Palestine, Iran and Iraq have *C. j. neuroticus*, northern and eastern African populations are *C. j. uropygialis* and *C. j. perennius*, and Gabon, Angola and southern Africa are *C. j. terrestris*. India has two sub-species, *C. j. salimalii* of the Western Ghats and *C. j. cursitans* of the plains of India and the dry areas of Sri Lanka (which shows a seasonal tail length variation not seen in *C. j. salimalii*). Besides, southern parts of South-east Asia have *C. j. malaya*, southern China has *C. j. tinnabulans*, and Korea and Japan have *C. j. brunniceps*. The other populations seen are *C. j. nigrostriatus* (Philippines), *C. j. constans* (Sulawesi), *C. j. fuscicapilla* (east Java), *C. j. leanyeri* (northern Australia), *C. j. normani* (northwest Queensland) and *C. j. laveryi* (northeast Australia). Most populations are resident, though the south Asian populations may move south to warmer areas in winter.

The birds in India are brown above, heavily streaked with black markings, while the underparts are whitish or sandy. The white of the throat goes halfway around the neck before blending into the darker upperparts. The tail is broad, rounded, brown and white-tipped, while the rump is rufous and vent is pale. Adult males show less streaking on the crown, and more markings on the back, than the females. It is separated from the Golden-headed Cisticola by the absence of a golden nuchal collar.

Habitat & behaviour: The Zitting Cisticola is usually seen singly or in pairs, in grasslands, meadows, agricultural areas, marshes and reeds near water. Small groups may sometimes be seen. Like most small birds, it is fast-moving and hyperactive, hopping around between the reeds or on the ground. It is insectivorous and feeds on a variety of small insects and invertebrates, especially grasshoppers; it may also take spiders, insect larvae, mantids, and even the seeds of aquatic plants. It is usually heard before it is seen, owing to its tendency to utter its characteristic single-note *chik chik* call in undulating flight before dropping down to the reeds (although it can also call from a perch). The song is a monosyllabic, high-pitched *cist*, repeated in an even rhythm about once every second, and the alarm call is a short, clipped *witt*, repeated in series. While perched, it tends to flick or fan its tail repeatedly, which may have given rise to the earlier name of Streaked Fantail Warbler.

Nesting: The Zitting Cisticola breeds any time between March and August, but generally around the monsoons. The cup-shaped nest, suspended within a clump of grass, is made by binding living leaves into the fabric of grass, cobwebs and felted plant-down, with a canopy of leaves or grasses tied together overhead for camouflage. The initial nest is made by the male, who invites the female to inspect it; once approved, the female completes the nest. The usual clutch consists of 3-6 white eggs with deep red or brown splotches. Incubation duties are handled by the female, and more than one brood may be raised in a season. The female birds change their mates and territory frequently, while males tend to stay in the same area, and are generally polygynous.

Local name: The Zitting Cisticola is known as *'Ghas ki phutki'* or *'Ghas ki pitpiti'* in Hindi, *'Chhoti dharidar piddi'* in Punjabi, *'Tinu kuruvi'* or *'Vayalan'* in Tamil, *'Yerdu jitta'* or *'Yedru jitta'* in Telugu and '*Potappottan'* in Malayalam.

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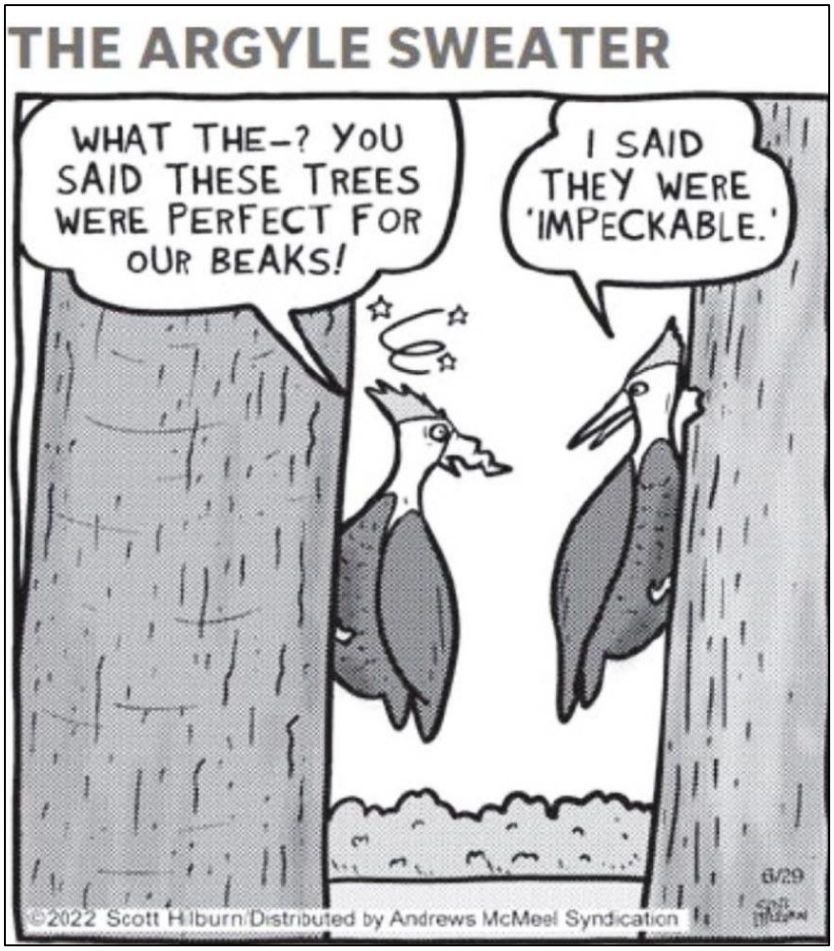
Bird Humour

Umesh Mani


THE ARGYLE SWEATER
WHAT THE-? YOU SAID THESE TREES WERE PERFECT FOR OUR BEAKS!
I SAID THEY WERE 'IMPECKABLE.'
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(From Facebook, July 25, 2022)

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For information, write to: Deccan Birders, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **Website:** www.deccanbirders.in. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/deccanbirders. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (*Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)*